



# A Glossary of Literary Terms

NINTH EDITION

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## To Ruth

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## About the Authors

**M. H. Abrams**, Class of 1916 Professor of English at Cornell University, Emeritus, is a distinguished scholar who has written prize-winning books on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature, literary theory and criticism, European Romanticism, and Western intellectual history. His *A Glossary of Literary Terms* is a series of succinct essays on the chief terms and concepts used in discussing literature, literary history and movements, and literary criticism. Since first published in 1957, the *Glossary* has become an indispensable handbook for all students of English and other literatures.

**Geoffrey Galt Harpham** is president and director of the National Humanities Center in North Carolina. He has written extensively in the fields of intellectual history and critical theory, and on the work of Joseph Conrad. Among his books are *The Character of Criticism*, *Shadows of Ethics: Criticism and the Just Society*, and *Language Alone: The Critical Fetish of Modernity*.



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## Preface

This book defines and discusses terms, critical theories, and points of view that are commonly applied in classifying, analyzing, interpreting, and writing the history of works of literature. The component entries, together with the guides to further reading included in most of them, are oriented especially toward undergraduate students of English, American, and other literatures. Over the decades, however, the book has proved to be a useful and popular work of reference for advanced students, as well as for the general reader with literary interests.

*A Glossary of Literary Terms* consists of succinct essays in the alphabetic order of the title word or phrase. Terms that are related but subsidiary, or that designate subclasses, are discussed under the title heading of the primary or generic term; in addition, words that are often used in conjunction, or as mutually defining contraries, are discussed in the same essay. The alternative organization of a literary handbook as a dictionary of terms, defined singly, makes dull reading and requires excessive repetition and cross-indexing. It may also be misleading, because the application of many terms becomes clear only in the context of other terms and concepts to which they are related, subordinated, or opposed. The essay form also makes it feasible to supplement the definition of a literary term with indications of its changes in meaning over time, and of its diversity of meanings in current usage, in order to help readers steer their way through the shifting references and submerged ambiguities of its varied applications. In addition, the discursive treatment of literary terms provides an opportunity to write entries that are not only informative, but pleasurable to read. In each entry, **boldface** identifies terms for which the entry provides the principal discussion, and *italics* indicate terms that are discussed more fully elsewhere in the *Glossary*.

The purpose of this new edition is to keep the entries current with innovations in critical views and methods, to take into account important new publications in literature, criticism, and scholarship, and also to take advantage of suggestions for improvements and additions, some solicited by the publisher and others volunteered by users of the *Glossary*. All the entries have been reviewed, and most of them have

been revised in order to clarify or add verve to the exposition, but above all, to bring the entries up to date in their substance, their references, and their lists of suggested readings. Books originally published in languages other than English are listed in their English translation.

Mainly in response to requests by readers, 24 terms have been added in this edition of the *Glossary*. Especially notable are substantial new essays on the *book*, *book history studies*, *Darwinian literary studies*, and the concept of the *fine arts*. The book now encompasses discussions of more than 1,150 literary terms.

The aim of this new version of the *Glossary* remains the one announced by its author in the first edition: to produce the kind of handbook he would have found most valuable when, as an undergraduate, he was an eager but sometimes bewildered student of literature and literary criticism.



## Acknowledgments

This edition, like preceding ones, has profited greatly from the suggestions of both teachers and students who proposed changes and additions that would enhance the usefulness of the *Glossary* to the broad range of courses in American, English, and other literatures. The following teachers, at the request of the publisher, made many useful proposals for improvements:

Michael Sharp, *Binghamton University*  
Roxanne Eberle, *The University of Georgia*  
Richard Frost, *State University College, Oneonta, NY*  
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Dr. Kim Stone, *Illinois State University*  
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As in many earlier editions, Dianne Ferriss has been indispensable in preparing, correcting, and recording the text of the *Glossary*. Michael Rosenberg, Publisher at Cengage Learning, continues to be an enthusiastic supporter of each new edition. Karen Judd has helped tremendously in her role as Managing Development Editor, Jessica Rasile ensured that the production process went smoothly, and Sharon Grant performed her usual professional job of copyediting the manuscript.



## How to Use This Glossary

To expedite reference to a literary term, this edition has merged the former *Index of Terms* with the entries that make up the text of the book. The reader will now find, in a single alphabetic listing, all the terms discussed in the *Glossary*. Each term that is not itself the subject of the entry it identifies is followed, in **boldface**, by the number of the page in which it is defined and discussed. This is followed by the page numbers, in *italics*, of the occurrences of the term in other entries, in contexts that clarify its significance and illustrate how it is used in critical discourse; in the text of these entries, the term itself is italicized.

Some of the listed terms are supplemented by references to a number of closely related terms. These references expedite for a student the fuller exploration of a literary topic, and make it easier for a teacher to locate entries that serve the needs of a particular subject of study. For example, supplementary references list entries that identify the various types and movements of literary *criticism*, the terms most relevant to the analysis of *style*, the entries that define and exemplify the various literary *genres*, and the many entries that deal with the forms, component features, history, and critical discussions of the *drama*, *lyric*, and *novel*.

Those terms, mainly of foreign origin, that are most likely to be mispronounced by a student are followed (in parentheses) by a simplified guide to pronunciation. The following vowel markings are used:

â (fate)	ĩ (pin)
ă (pat)	õ (rope)
ä (father)	ö (pot)
ē (meet)	oo (food)
ě (get)	ü (cut)
ī (pine)	

Authors and their works that are discussed in the *Glossary* are listed in an *Index of Authors* at the end of this volume. To make it easy to locate, the outer edges of the *Index* are colored gray.